Your opinion

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Update maritime safety rules

MALAYSIA needs to update the Malaysian Shipping Ordinance (MSO) 1952 to enhance maritime safety. It was published way before independence in 1957 and the formation of Malaysia in 1963 – it is 71 years old!

According to the national news agency, from January to September 2022, Malaysia recorded total maritime trade of RM1.1bil with exports rising by 4.3% to RM551mil compared with RM528mil in January to September 2021. Imports increased by 7.1% to RM550mil in the same period in 2022 compared with RM514mil in January-September 2021.

It's obvious that the maritime industry is highly valuable and should be given much focus as it has an effect on the Malaysian economy as a whole.

The history of modern maritime safety was triggered by the sinking of the *Titanic* on April 14-15, 1912, and the loss of more than 1,500 lives. This led to the formulation of regulations collectively called Safety of Life at Sea (Solas); the updated version is mandatory under the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), which has 175 member states worldwide – including Malaysia.

I would like to provide a general overview of the minimum safety rules under Solas that all merchant ships of any flag or state must comply with to show why Malaysia's MSO 1952 needs to be updated.

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Chapter 1: Under general provisions, surveys and certification of all safety items must be conducted.

Chapter 2.1: This deals with the watertight integrity of the ship, especially for passenger vessels.

Chapter 2.2: On fire protection, fire detection and extinction, and the means and measures for fire protection in accommodation, cargo spaces and engine rooms for passenger, cargo and tanker ships.

Chapter 3: On lifesaving appliances and arrangements; all such equipment and their use in different situations are described.

Chapter 4: Under radio communications, cargo and passenger vessels require a Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), search and rescue transponder (SART), and an Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB), a device to alert search and rescue services in an emergency. This is an example why Malaysia's MSO 1952 must be updated as these requirements are not included due the state of technology then.

Chapter 5: Safety of navigation deals with all seagoing vessels of all sizes, from boats to VLCCs (very large crude carriers), and includes passage planning, navigation, distress signals, etc.

Chapter 6: Carriage of cargoes defines methods of storing and securing different cargo and containers (but it does not include oil and gas cargo).

Chapter 7: Carriage of dangerous goods defines the International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code for storing and transporting hazardous goods.

Chapter 8: Safety code for nuclear-propelled ships.

Chapter 9: The International Safety Management Code (ISMC) for ship owners and operators is described clearly – the ISMC was non-existent in MSO 1952.

Chapter 10: Safety measures for high-speed craft are explained.

Chapter 11.1 & 11.2: Special and enhanced survey for safe operation, other operational requirements and the International Ship and Port Facility Code is covered here.

Chapter 12: Additional safety measures for bulk carriers are explained and includes safety requirements for bulk carriers that are longer than 150m.

Chapter 13: This covers verification of compliance with regulations.

Chapter 14: Safety measures for ships operating in polar waters.

These are just a small portion of the rules and regulations with which maritime vessels must comply and already we can see areas that the MSO 1952 could not possibly cover in its original form.

It is high time that it is replaced by a new Merchant Shipping Act.

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